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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: GAZA UPDATE JANUARY 13, 2009, 1300 LOCAL

REF: JERUSALEM 111

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Israeli military operations continued January 12-13, with heavy fighting occurring in and around Gaza City as troops moved closer to urban areas. Airstrikes targeted the northern Gaza Strip and the Rafah border area. Gaza-based medical sources reported as many as 921 Palestinians dead and 4,250 wounded since hostilities began. A "humanitarian pause" took place from 0900-1200 local. Protests continued in the West Bank. End summary.

Ground Operations Continue,
Focus on Northern Gaza

¶2. (SBU) Gaza-based sources, local press, and the UN reported that IDF operations continued on the northern, southern, and eastern edges of Gaza City January 12-13, making incremental progress toward the urban center. The IDF maintained positions throughout Gaza, including the Karni-Netzarim road from the coast to the border, from which IDF troops launched raids into southern Gaza City. Several contacts in Gaza City and around Khan Yunis described the night of January 12 as the worst since operations began, with continuous airstrikes and tank shelling.

-- NORTHERN GAZA: Gaza-based press and the UN reported that the IDF clashed with militants January 12-13 in al-Atatra and al-Sayfa (north of Bayt Lahiya), and in the Izbet Abed Rabbo area of Jabaliya. Israeli press reported that the IDF discovered two tunnels running into Israel from the northern Gaza Strip, one of them near the Karni/al-Mintar crossing.

-- GAZA CITY: Gaza-based press and the UN reported that the IDF advanced several hundred meters toward the urban areas of Gaza City January 12-13, shelling and engaging militants under helicopter back-up. Fighting was reported in the southeast neighborhood of Zaytun and the eastern neighborhoods of Tuffah and Shujaiyah, where an IDF tank shell killed three and wounded seven others. Fighting was also reported the morning of January 13 in the southwest neighborhoods of Tel al-Hawa and Tel al-Islam, and in the northwest neighborhood of Twam. Israeli press reported that the Givati Brigade Roten Regiment was operating on the southern outskirts of Gaza City, the Golani Brigade was east of Gaza City, and paratroopers were north of Gaza City. The Armored 401st Brigade was operating along the Karni-Netzarim road from the coast to the Gaza border.

-- SOUTHERN GAZA: The UN reported that fighting continued January 12-13 in Khuza'a and around Abasan, east of Khan Yunis.

¶3. (SBU) The UN reported that the IDF maintained positions near the Erez crossing, al-Zahra village (northwest of the Nusayrat refugee camp), east of Johr al-Dik (northeast of al-Burayj), near Abu al-Ajeen (east of Dayr al-Balah), and east of the Rafah airport on January 13. No fighting was reported in these locations.

Airstrikes and Naval Barrage Continue

14. (SBU) Gaza-based sources, local press, and the UN reported that the IAF hit 60 targets overnight January 12-13, targeting mainly northern Gaza, Gaza City, and the Rafah border area.

-- NORTHERN GAZA: The UN reported IAF airstrikes against Bayt Lahiya January 12-13, killing at least two and wounding at least six others. IAF airstrikes also targeted Jabaliya, including the Shaykh Zaid City area.

-- GAZA CITY: Gaza-based press and the UN reported that IAF airstrikes in Gaza City January 12-13 killed two militants and wounded ten Palestinians in Palestine Square, the main square in the center of Gaza City, and killed two militants in the Zaytun neighborhood. An airstrike also killed a woman and three children in a home in the Twam neighborhood. Airstrikes were reported against the Gaza harbor.

-- CENTRAL GAZA: The UN reported Israeli naval shelling of the area southwest of the Nusayrat refugee camp.

-- SOUTHERN GAZA: Press reported that IAF airstrikes continued along the Egyptian border January 12-13, and strikes destroyed homes in Rafah and Khan Yunis.

Rockets Continue

15. (SBU) Press reported at least four rockets fired into Israel from Gaza on January 13 as of 1300 local, with no reported

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casualties. Press reported 23 rockets from Gaza landed in Israel on January 12.

Casualties

16. (SBU) Gaza-based medical sources told the press that a total of 27-30 Palestinians died January 12-13, including a paramedic killed during rescue work in Jabaliya. The sources estimated that 921 Palestinians have been killed since IDF operations began (including at least 275 children, 93 women, 13 paramedics, and three journalists), and that 4,250 people have required medical treatment for injuries (including at least 1,333 children and 587 women). The sources said that many Gazans are dying in hospitals of wounds sustained over the past two weeks.

17. (SBU) Israeli press reported that three IDF soldiers were wounded in Gaza the morning of January 13. Press also reported that up to eight soldiers were wounded -- four of them possibly by friendly fire -- January 12.

Humanitarian Situation

18. (SBU) A "humanitarian pause" took place January 13 from 0900-1200 local, during which some fighting was reported. An IDF spokesman made unconfirmed claims that Hamas was looting truckloads of humanitarian goods and selling them, rather than distributing them free of charge.

19. (SBU) A Gaza City contact reported that IDF strikes on buildings in Gaza City the morning of January 13 knocked out several electricity and phone lines. Many areas of Gaza City that had 4-12 hours of electricity on January 12 are now in blackout. The contact lives near the UNRWA headquarters in Central Gaza, just northwest of the Zaytun neighborhood, where heavy fighting is taking place. He said that he heard several explosions in Gaza City from 0900-0930, as the reported "humanitarian pause" was to begin. He reported that markets are still supplied with commercial food items, such as small (non-aid agency) bags of flour, sugar, rice, lentils, milk and yogurt. He said that customers are limited to purchasing only a few items, given high demand.

Political Developments

¶10. (SBU) Hamas leaders, including Ismail Haniya and Usama Hamdan, in separate statements January 12 said that Hamas is considering the Egyptian initiative, but maintained that Hamas would continue "resistance" against Israel (see reftel). They also indicated that Hamas would consider international observers along the Gaza/Egypt border as long as Hamas has a role administering the crossing point.

West Bank Reaction and Security

¶11. (SBU) Professional syndicates held peaceful protests across the West Bank January 13 at 1100 local. A peaceful protest took place January 12 in Ramallah, and Palestinian youth skirmished with the IDF during protests in Qalandiya and near Baytunia, with no injuries reported. Three Israeli soldiers near Hebron were lightly wounded by glass shattered by Palestinian gunfire January 12. Settlers from Karni Shomron threw rocks at Palestinian cars, causing no injuries. The IDF arrested 16 Palestinians across the West Bank January 12-13.

WALLES